

MEETING SUMMARY

REGIONAL LAW, SAFETY AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE (RLSJC)

Thursday, April 30th, 2009
7:30 AM – 9:00 AM

One Night Count on Homelessness in King County – Alison Eisinger, Seattle-King County Coalition for the Homeless and Kate Spelz, King County Department of Community and Human Services

Alison Eisinger provided some background information on the Seattle-King County Coalition for the Homeless (SKCCH). SKCCH is a countywide coalition of service providers that works to ensure the safety and survival of people who are homeless and to end the crisis of homelessness. For the past 25 years, SKCCH has been performing a point in time count of homeless individuals. The count has two components. Volunteers conduct a street count of unsheltered homeless individuals. King County conducts a survey of shelters and other providers to estimate the sheltered homeless population.

The One Night Count is conducted in January. The street count happens between 2 and 5 AM. Hundreds of volunteers go to pre-mapped areas to identify homeless individuals. In 2009, the count was conducted in 13 cities. The count identified 8951 homeless individuals: 2827 unsheltered individuals, approximately 2500 individuals in shelters, and approximately 3500 individuals in transitional housing. Since the count is not conducted everywhere, it underestimates the total homeless population.

The One Night Count raises public awareness of homelessness. It shows that King County has succeeded in sheltering many people, but more work needs to be done to end homelessness. SKCCH offers a Beyond the One Night Count workshop to train volunteers to advocate at the local, state, and federal levels. The next workshop will be held on May 30th and will focus on federal advocacy.

Kate Spelz provided some background on the shelter survey. The survey is conducted on the same night as the street count. A survey is sent to every emergency shelter and transitional housing organization and asks the providers for information on demographics, household type, life experiences (e.g. veteran status, domestic violence, mental health issues), last address, and income. While the survey data does not represent the entire homeless population, it does provide a snapshot of the sheltered population. In general, single individuals are more likely to be in emergency shelters while families with children are more likely to be in transitional housing. The 2009 survey identified more than 1000 households with children in sheltered housing. Eighty percent of those surveyed reported Seattle as their last address.

In addition to the shelter survey, the One Night Count examined data on individuals turned away from shelters. Turn away data can be problematic because it contains duplicates as individuals often have to call multiple shelters. The Count estimated that shelters that received families with children received 142 unduplicated calls that resulted in turn aways. Those calls represented 176 adults and 283 children who were turned away from shelters.

If you have any questions regarding the One Night Count, please contact Alison Eisinger at Alison@homelessinfo.org or Kate Spelz at kate.spelz@kingcounty.gov.

Update on Committee to End Homelessness – Bill Block, King County Department of Community and Human Services

Bill Block provided an update on the Committee to End Homelessness of King County (CEHKC). CEHKC is working on a number of issues related to criminal justice. A large number of homeless individuals cycle in and out of the mental health system, often with associated criminal justice involvement. King County is using a Program for Assertive Community Treatment (PACT), an evidence based program, to ensure that these individuals receive appropriate treatment and supportive services including stable housing. A related program, the Forensic Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) addresses specifically those mentally ill persons who are highly involved with the criminal justice system. Together, PACT and FACT will help over 230 people at a time. Additionally, the County has started the Forensic Intensive Services and Housing (FISH) program to provide services to sixty mentally ill homeless individuals in the criminal justice system who are not competent to stand trial and not ill enough to be committed. Without FISH, these individuals would be released to the street. CEHKC has also established a fund to provide rental assistance to individuals have housing but who risk losing it during short periods of incarceration (such as for a parole violation).

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CEHKC is also working to help the various service systems work together more effectively. The Funders Group coordinates policy and implementation among King County, the City of Seattle, the suburban cities, and major funders like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Seattle and King County Housing Authorities. Some of the priorities of the Funders Group are working on ensuring that families are placed in the appropriate housing unit rather than the first unit available, providing the same coordinated entry for chronically homeless single adults, and working with landlords to open up more housing opportunities for homeless individuals including, for example, those with criminal records.

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If you have any questions regarding CEHKC, please contact Bill Block at bill.block@kingcounty.gov.

King County Council Law, Justice, Health and Human Services Committee Work Plan – Clifton Curry and Kelli Carroll King County Council

Clif Curry and Kelli Carroll provided an update on the King County Council's Law, Justice, Health and Human Services (LJHHS) Committee. The LJHHS Committee will be focusing on space planning efforts which will address the family court and juvenile detention facilities at 12th and Alder, District Court space planning at the Maleng Regional Justice Center, and evidence storage for the King County Sheriff's Office. Additionally, the Committee will be studying security needs at County facilities. The LJHHS committee is preparing for the 2010 Budget and will be providing policy direction given the anticipated decline in resources. Criminal Justice services constitute approximately 72% of the General Fund which is projecting a significant deficit in 2010. Human Service agencies are facing deep reductions from both the local and state governments. Public Health is also facing potential cuts, but does not have a dedicated revenue source. The Mental Illness Drug Dependency (MIDD) sales tax can be used to backfill some of the gaps in criminal justice and human services given the fact that a limited portion of revenue can now be used to supplant existing funds. The MIDD Oversight Committee is developing a tool to prioritize MIDD services in 2010. However, the final decision on the MIDD budget rests with the King County Executive and

Council.

If you have any questions regarding the LJHHS workplan, please contact Clifton Curry at clifton.curry@kingcounty.gov or Kelli Carroll at kelli.carrol@kingcounty.gov.